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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a model for converting junior high schools to middle schools. The model guides educators through a series of questions which, when answered, will hopefully produce a school with those characteristics which exemplify a good middle school. The model was developed by eight inservice educators, from broad educational perspectives, as a part of an innovative course at Montana State University. This course was a simulation of the conversion of a junior high to a middle school. As important as the model itself, was the process involved in producing the product. The process can be used in both undergraduate and graduate teacher education. One of the authors has used the process successfully in undergraduate educational psychology as well. (Author)

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QUESTIONS MODEL FOR DEVELOPING A MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Q-ING PROCESS: THE QUESTIONS MODEL
FOR DEVELOPING A MIDDLE SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is a result of non-traditional course delivery at Montana State University. It resulted when an MSU faculty member and seven graduate students (masters and doctoral level) decided that the traditional lecture format would not suffice because of the extensive expertise of all parties involved. The eight of us thought that it would be much more valuable for each of us to share our individual expertise with each other rather than just have the professor pontificate on the characteristics of a middle school and why it should replace the junior high school. We brainstormed possibilities and decided that we would all learn best from a simulated conversion of a junior high school to a middle school. We became partners in an exciting educational exercise.

Our purpose in presenting this paper is twofold. We think that the simulation process we used produced increased learning for all parties involved and, in itself, could be a model for inservice teacher education and we think that the product we produced will provide school districts with a sound model for guiding their efforts to develop good middle schools.

The model is based on asking the right questions to retrieve data useful for a plan of action to create an

effective middle school. It is a synthesis of the current middle school research on learning theory, brain research, and other pertinent exemplary middle school philosophy. The model encompasses the expertise of the eight educators mentioned above. They represent administration, middle, junior high and high school teaching, curriculum planning, counseling and university perspectives.

THE Q-ING PROCESS MODEL

DEFINITION CUES: **1. WHY A MIDDLE SCHOOL?**

Fact: transescence (the developmental period prior to the onset of puberty and early adolescence) coincides more closely with students in grades 6-8, not 7-9 (Eichhorn, 1966, 3);

Fact: physically, emotionally, intellectually, ninth graders more closely align with students in grade 10 than those in grade 8 (Alexander, 1969, 58);

Fact: a brain growth plateau occurs in grades seven and eight while a growth spurt coincides with grades nine and ten (Toepfer in Hass, 1983, 432.);

Fact: junior high has developed into an imitation of senior high (Van Til in Hass, 1983, 418);

Fact: ninth grade remains in a college-preparatory posture (Van Til in Hass , 1983, 418) with Carnegie unit credit given for grade 9 courses (Alexander, 1969, 58);

Fact: more children today are members of single-parent homes and require the stability of a middle school environment; (Dowling, 1986, 78-9);

Fact: middle school students need the exploratory or experimental attitudes in curriculum (Alexander in Hass, 1983, 438); and,

Fact: teachers holding teaching certificates in elementary education are presumed to be equipped to teach grades 1-8; those with secondary certificates, grades 9-12 (Alexander in Hass, 1983, 55)

2. WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL?

Middle School Philosophy

The junior high school appeared on the American educational scene approximately three quarters of a century ago. It was a result of taking grade nine from the high school and combining it with grades seven and eight from the elementary school. Although the original purposes of the junior high school were to provide a smooth transition from the elementary school to the secondary school and to keep more students from dropping out of school, the experts disagree as to whether it still performs this function. Many educators agree that the junior high school has become just that --a miniature high school-- complete with departmentalization, marching bands, interscholastic athletics and a social system that rivals the high school in competitive nature.

We believe that the middle school offers an alternative to this organization, that it offers the most promising hope for change in American education which will meet the unique

needs of this group of children aged 10 to 14, which we call the transescent period.

As an organization, the middle school facilitates the inclusion of many innovative practices based on years of experience and research in child development. The following are characteristics of the generic middle school. Most exemplary middle schools contain some or all of the following characteristics.

Flexible Scheduling

Middle schools offer a schedule that is a compromise between the large single block of time in the elementary school and the smaller time periods of the high school. Scheduling is a major instructional activity that reflects the school objectives and knowledge of human growth and development. Scheduling options include blocks, periods and modules. Flexibility in scheduling makes it possible to reflect the needs of students (Alexander, 1981, 173).

Continuous Progress

In the transescent years, students vary in their mental and physical development. Students are grouped according to their abilities to progress through the course of study. Each child is assured of success, is constantly under the right amount of pressure, and experiences learning appropriate to his/her needs. Continuous progress, or

nongradedness, eliminates grade labels and requires a reporting system that emphasizes the uniqueness of each child (Moss, 1969, 154).

Interdisciplinary Teaching Teams

Team teaching gives teachers the opportunity to share instructional strategies, coach one another, and increase teaching repertoires (Joyce, 1982, 6). Strengths of individual teachers can be targeted and used effectively in the classroom. Team teaching and collaborative planning by an interdisciplinary team tends to group students according to their instructional needs (Brown, 1981, 18).

Teacher/Counseling Guidance Program

Group guidance is important, but students have individual needs that they may want to share with only one person, perhaps a guidance counselor or a homeroom teacher (Brown, 1981, 19). Often the homeroom teacher can relate to the daily problems of the transescent in a more timely fashion than the school counselor. The use of an advisee-advisor program with a home base group of 25 students can be highly effective. The teacher provides advice on personal and academic concerns on a daily and weekly basis.

Specially Certificated and Trained Staff

Specially certificated and trained teachers are used in the middle school so that the special needs of students in this age group can be dealt with more effectively than if the staff were prepared to educate at the elementary or secondary levels. It is important that the teachers are trained to identify with the transcescent student and trained in the methods of teaching used in the middle school setting.

Exploratory Curricula/Extra-curricular

A middle school is an ideal situation for students to explore various curricular options not available in the elementary curriculum. With more direction and guidance than that of the high school curriculum, students at this level take exploratory courses, do special interest activities, seminars, and independent study.

Students may have the opportunity to explore extra-curricular activities on the interscholastic level; however, focus in the middle school is on intramural activities.

Student-centered Instruction/Socialization

The emphasis in the middle school should be on the needs of the student at his/her level of maturity or socialization, not on the curriculum. Student-centered

instruction correlates knowledge and skill with personal growth and development. This emphasis should be a means of social experience based on peer interaction and adult guidance (Merenbloom, 1982, 22).

Independent Study

Independent study, which is encouraged as part of the unique learning environment of the middle school, enhances both student-centered instruction and the exploratory curriculum. Independent study could be an individual, a team, or a group responding to curiosity about a topic or following a teacher's preplanned study for broader knowledge. In either case, independent study serves to generate individual responsibility, to encourage individual interests, and to offer experience in decision making. The degree of teacher involvement is dependent upon the readiness of the transescent child.

Student Recognition Program

A program must be developed to break the traditional pattern of recognition for the select few who seem to excel in everything. Every student should have the realistic possibility of receiving deserved praise and recognition. This can be achieved by broadening the traditional base of categories which are established as goals to be recognized and applauded (Grossnickle, 1986, 8-9).

Parent Involvement Program

To sustain quality education, the middle school should be ready to pick up where the elementary school leaves off by encouraging worthwhile parental involvement. For effective results there must be a variety of parental roles, and the involvement of parents must be long term (Myers, 1985, 8-10).

3. WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

Alexander, W. M. et al. THE EMERGENT MIDDLE SCHOOL 2nd ed. (New York: Rinehart and Winston, Inc.) 1969.

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Merenbloom, Elliot. DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE MIDDLE SCHOOLS THROUGH FACULTY PARTICIPATION. (Fairborn, Ohio: National Middle School Association) 1982.

Moss, Theodore C. MIDDLE SCHOOL. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin.) 1969.

Myers, J.W. INVOLVING PARENTS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATION (Columbus, Ohio: National Middle School Association Publications) 1985.

Van Til, William. Junior high school or middle school? CURRICULUM PLANNING: A NEW APPROACH. Hass, Glenn, ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc. 1983). 418.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT CUES:

1. **(DESCRIPTION) WHAT IS THE PRESENT EDUCATIONAL SITUATION FOR TRANSESCENT CHILDREN IN OUR DISTRICT?**

A needs assessment should begin with accurate description of your present situation beginning with a poll of your teachers and administrators. Some suggested questions you might use:

Are your transescent students presently part of an

elementary school?

junior high school?

or high school?

What mode of scheduling is used?

How are your students grouped?

What grading (evaluation) system is used?

What teaching strategies are used?

How is individual/group counseling accomplished?

How is group/individual guidance accomplished?

What are teachers/ areas of certification/endorsement?

What is the curricular emphasis?

What is the extra-curricular emphasis?

How are personal growth and development addressed?

Are students or subject areas the center of instruction?

How is the pursuit of individual interests encouraged?

How does every child receive recognition?

How are parents involved in your school?

2. (PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM) WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO INFORM OR ASSESS THE COMMUNITY? HOW HAVE YOU ADDRESSED INTERNAL/EXTERNAL COMMUNITIES? HOW HAVE THE ISSUES OF MORALE, GOODWILL, UNDERSTANDING, AND SUPPORT OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CONCEPT BEEN ADDRESSED?

Before asking the community what it wants for a school program for transescent children, it is necessary to inform ... community as to ...e unique c...aracteristics of transescent children as well as successful school programs across the nation, and the importance of parents and the community at large in developing a program to meet the needs of these children. In addition to informing the community, it is advisable to include them in the planning process. Public relations and involvement are the keys to success in this stage of the model. Parents and community members who are informed will be more likely to answer the question: "What do we want for our transescent children?" in an

intelligent manner and in a way to promote the middle school movement.

Educating the community is only part of the job. There are many teachers at the junior high school who are elementary or secondary oriented. These teachers sometimes have a mindset that is incompatible with the goals of the middle school. Therefore, a program to educate teachers is just as necessary as is a program to educate the community. It should be remembered that unhappy and uninvolved teachers sabotage a program.

In our research on successful middle school conversions, we found a number of strategies which contributed to success. The strategies that follow are divided into categories--external for community and parents, internal for teachers and other school personnel.

External Strategies

handbooks which address the audiences of parents/nonparents/kids

brochures addressing specific issues

bibliography/articles reprinted for distribution

parent/teacher visitations of exemplary schools

parents organized as a parents-as-promoters group

open forums

media programs

opinion polls

coin a promotional phrase

contact key people

Internal Strategies

address the issue in the initial inservice days in the fall

take an active, systematic approach distributing various materials on middle schools

assemble a middle school collection in the professional library which includes books, magazines, pamphlets and other professional publications- all of which can be used by professional staff and parent/nonparent groups

NOTE--It is important to tabulate findings from the interviews, opinion polls, etc. Compilation may be informal such as "42 percent of the 200 teachers polled presently encourage the pursuit of individual interests." The compilation will be utilized in the discrepancy model of Q-3, below.

3. WHAT DO WE WANT FOR OUR TRANSESCENT CHILDREN?
(See Figure 1. Sample Cue Discrepancy Matrix)

Column one in the matrix lists the characteristics decided on as important for a middle school. Column two defines what we presently have in our junior high school. Column three lists our wants for the middle school based on column one characteristics and other information gained previously from professional and lay input.

4. **WHAT ARE THE DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN PRESENT SITUATION AND THE NEEDS OF TRANSESCENT CHILDREN IN OUR DISTRICT?**
(See Figure 1. Sample Cue Discrepancy Matrix)

Column four compares column two and three and notes any discrepancies between the two. Comparing these two columns allows us to complete column four with needs based on discrepancies.

STRATEGY CUE:

1. **WHAT OBJECTIVES WILL MEET OUR IDENTIFIED NEEDS?**
(See Figure 2. Action Plan for Strategy, Design, Implementation Cues)

Figure 2 is a sample action plan. Each of ten needs identified in Figure 1 (Sample Cue Discrepancy Matrix) is broken down into objectives to meet the needs (Column one, Figure 2).

DESIGN CUES:

1. **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DEVELOPING THE PLANS FOR MEETING EACH OBJECTIVE?**
2. **HOW WILL EACH OBJECTIVE BE MET?**
(See Figure 2. Action Plan for Strategy, Design, Implementation Cues)

Question one: "Who is responsible for developing the plans for meeting each objective?" is answered in column two. It should be noted that the delegation of responsibility might vary from district to district and that Figure 2 is only an example. Appendix B allows each district to complete their own form, based on its own needs.

Sample Cue Discrepancy Matrix

Figure 1

Middle School Characteristics	What Is (Present)	What Should Be (Wants)	Needs
1. Flexible Scheduling	Departmentalized-all students on one schedule.	Block scheduling.	Schedule to meet the needs of students.
2. Continuous Progress	Strict adherence to grade levels and standard A, B, C, D, F grading system.	Students placed according to mastery of outcomes.	Students grouped according to progress. Experiences appropriate to their needs.
3. Interdisciplinary Teaching Teams	Departmentalized; one instructor for each discipline/subject.	Teachers sharing instructional strategies.	Collaborative planning, team teaching and coaching.
4. Teacher/Counseling Guidance Program	Guidance provided by one resident guidance counselor.	A Home Base program where students can receive individual & group guidance.	Establishing daily advisor-advisee program with a 1:25 counseling ratio in addition to resident counselors.
5. Specially Certificated and Trained Staff	90% of the current staff possesses secondary certification (7-12)	A staff trained to understand the academic and social needs of the transescent.	Lobby for middle school certification, in-service for all staff not previously trained in growth and development of transescents, develop university coursework
6. Exploratory Curricula/ Co-curricular Program	Curricula offerings meeting the state minimum requirements for core curricula.	Programs that allow students to build upon individual interests.	A program that meets the wide and varied interests of the transescent.
7. Student-centered Instruction and Socialization	Instruction is based on the curriculum content.	Instruction based on the level of maturity of the student.	Student-centered instruction correlating knowledge and skill with personal growth and development.
8. Independent Study	Some independent study is provided by a few teachers.	An opportunity for students to explore subjects in more depth with an emphasis on individual responsibility.	Curriculum writing by teachers to provide primary research at all levels and within all disciplines. Opportunity for students to set goals and explore group investigation teaching model.
9. Student Recognition Program	Some teachers identify and give awards to some students, usually only high achievers.	Broaden the base of categories for every student to receive praise and recognition.	Develop a program that recognizes and provides opportunities for all students to excel.
10. Parent Involvement Program	The PTA has not been active for the past ten years in our school.	Plan with parents to share experiences in the school setting.	Develop a program that encourages parents to become involved in the day-to-day business of our school.

Sample Action Plan for Strategy, Design, Implementation Cues

	Key Objectives	Responsibility	Expected Implementation Outcomes	Target Dates & Projected Costs
1.1)	to develop a flexible schedule of block design.	computer coordinator and vice-principal	four core subjects blocked together with flexible rotation	mid August $10,000
2.1)	to develop a system for grouping students according to their progress.	counselors and teachers	a less stressful learning environment for students	mid August $1,500
2.2)	to provide inservice on the process of designing learning experiences appropriate to criterion referenced objectives.	asst. superintendent for instruction and outside consultant	instruction will reflect teaching to cognitive and effective criterion referenced objectives	early June $3,500
3.1)	to divide teachers into interdisciplinary teams.	principal with teacher input	to provide a greater knowledge base and enriched curriculum	early June $0
3.2)	to schedule collaborative planning time.	computer coordinator and vice-principal	improved planning resulting in effective instructional delivery	mid August add 1.0 FTE
3.3)	to provide inservice on team-teaching and coaching.	assistant superintendent for instruction	increased teacher effectiveness	ongoing $8,000
3.4)	to set up coaching relationships.	principal and team leader	measurable outcomes from 3.3	after 1st inservice $0
4.1)	to provide inservice on the advisement program.	assistant superintendent for instruction	activation of program	mid August $300-500
4.2)	to schedule daily advisement periods.	computer coordinator and vice-principal	students receive individual and group guidance	mid August $0
4.3)	to develop a system for assigning advisees to advisers.	vice-principal	effective advisor/advisee relationships	mid August $0
4.4)	to delineate the tasks of the adviser and the counselor.	principal	well defined roles and cooperative relationships	after 1st inservice $0
5.1)	to provide inservice on the growth and development of transescent students.	assistant superintendent for instruction	make teachers and support staff aware of transescent needs	early June $300
5.2)	to form a lobby committee.	PTA, school board, and teachers organization	legislation on transescent certification	5 years from implementation $0 to district
5.3)	to coordinate a middle school training program with the university.	superintendent	a program to prepare certificated middle school teachers	2 years from implementation
5.4)	to develop a 5 year staff development plan.	superintendent	to complement 5.2 and 5.3	ongoing $1,000
6.1)	to design an exploratory curriculum.	curriculum committees and asst. supt. for instruction	implementation of middle school philosophy	mid August $4,000
7.1)	to provide inservice on student centered methods of instruction with emphasis on primary research strategies.	assistant superintendent for instruction	increased interest, knowledge, skill and personal development through teacher effectiveness	ongoing $1,500
8.1)	to write independent study guidelines incorporating the group investigation model.	interdisciplinary team leaders and principal	to emphasize responsibility and goal setting for independent study	mid August $300
9.1)	to write guidelines for the student recognition program.	student council and parent advisory council	opportunities for all students to excel and be rewarded for excellence	mid August nominal
10.1)	to devise parent participation program.	principal, parent advisory and student council	a well rounded on-going program of parent inclusion within instructional/ non-instructional roles.	mid August nominal

Figure 2

Question two: "How will each objective be met?" is answered in column three which describes what will be done to meet each objective. The samples given in Figure 2 are only guidelines and not for required implementation in all districts.

IMPLEMENTATION CUES:

1. WHAT IS THE TIME-FRAME FOR MEETING EACH OBJECTIVE AND BEGINNING IMPLEMENTATION?
2. WHAT ARE ANTICIPATED COSTS?
   (See Figure 2. Action Plan for Strategy, Design, Implementation Cues)

Questions one and two concerning time frames and projected costs are answered in column four. It can be seen that, in this way, costs and responsibility can be monitored. Again, this is only a sample. The cost figures are fictitious and only reasonable estimates made by those educators designing the model who have had budget experience.

EVALUATION CUES:

1. WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MONITORING OUR PROGRAM'S PROGRESS?
2. WHAT WILL BE THE PROCESS FOR ONGOING EVALUATION OF OUR PROGRAM?
   (see Figure 3. Organizational Responsibility Chart)

The assistant superintendent of instruction has the ultimate responsibility for program evaluation through building principal/teacher feedback. Evaluation during the implementation is at least quarterly where the assistant

Evaluation Cue One

Sample Organizational Chart

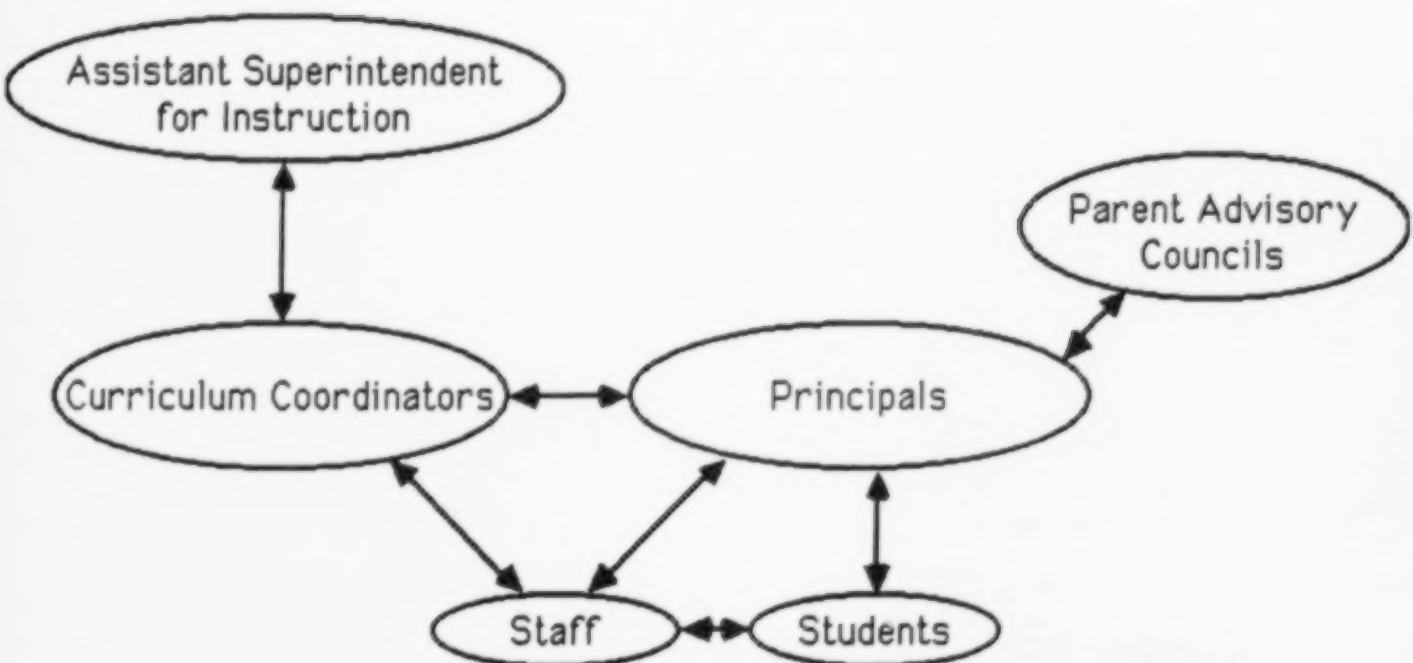

Figure 3

superintendent and curriculum coordinators examine the action plan, assess progress, chart revisions, and redefine goals. Thereafter, ongoing evaluation is annual, prior to student scheduling. The Organizational Responsibility Chart (Figure 3) shows a sample process. Arrows indicate two-way communication.

MODEL SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Q-ing Process Model is an attempt to synthesize the currrent middle school research on learning theory, brain growth periodization and other pertinent exemplery middle schools data. Educators of the 1960's viewed the concept as a fad but the test of time has determined that middle schools are sound educational practice. The concepts of the 60's have 1980's research validation and represent a credible educational perspective.

Cue Discrepancy Matrix

Appendix A

Middle School Characteristics	What is (Present)	What Should Be (Wants)	Needs
1. Flexible Scheduling			
2. Continuous Progress			
3. Interdisciplinary Teaching Teams			
4. Teacher/Counseling Guidance Program			
5. Specially Certificated and Trained Staff			

Cue Discrepancy Matrix (continued)

Middle School Characteristics	What is (Present)	What Should Be (Wants)	Needs
6. Exploratory Curricula/ Co-curricular Program			
7. Student-centered Instruction and Socialization			
8. Independent Study			
9. Student Recognition Program			
10. Parent Involvement Program			

Action Plan for Strategy, Design, Implementation Cues

	Key Objectives	Responsibility	Expected Implementation Outcomes	Target Dates & Projected Costs
1.1)				
2.1)				
2.2)				
3.1)				
3.2)				
3.3)				
3.4)				
4.1)				
4.2)				
4.3)				

Action Plan for Strategy, Design, Implementation Cues

(continued)

	Key Objectives	Responsibility	Expected Implementation Outcomes	Target Dates & Projected Costs
4.4)				
5.1)				
5.2)				
5.3)				
5.4)				
6.1)				
7.1)				
8.1)				
9.1)				
10.1)				